

# Asian Journal of University Education

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## **ASIAN JOURNAL OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION**

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## **“Book Review of Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates”**

Review by : Noridah Abu Bakar, Universiti Teknologi MARA,  
Malaysia  
Reference : Selwyn, Neil (2011). Education and Technology: Key  
Issues and Debates,  
New York : Continuum International Publishing Group, p 1-197

The book is written by Neil Selwyn, a Professor from the Faculty of Education in Monash University, Australia to probe our mind regarding issues of technology use in education that seems like inconsistent and often results in unintended consequences and subtle side-effects. The author makes an effort to highlight the problematic as well as the positive aspects of education and technology where most technology development is driven by ambitions to improve and innovate.

This book challenges expectations of the technological ‘transformation’ of education where digital technology is usually presumed to facilitate new and improved forms of education, but often is used to do the same things with just a minor difference. Hence, this book urges readers to be more realistic about education and technology. Despite the author’s effort in initiating a discussion of issues about the influence of technology in education, his point of view is generally optimistic and favorable of technology as a driver for better education, with proper strategic planning. The discussion around education is open and there are clear emphasis that technology in education is for us to manage instead of simply adopting it.

In the initial part of the book, the author tries to discuss the importance of technology in education, the underpinning theories in education and technology, issues related to individual learning and finally the role of teachers and educational institutions. The book highlights a range of educational processes, procedures and practices that can influence and socially shape the nature of technology use. These include classroom culture, ideas about pedagogy and curriculum, and the links between education and the world of work. Also included is the issue of educational policymaking and the hidden curriculum, as well as the everyday pressures of being a student or a teacher. Readers interested in teaching pedagogy, educational strategic management, risk management, classroom activities procedures in learning via technology will find this book interesting.

The author starts by defining education and technology. 'Learning' is defined as individual's involvement in making sense of who they are and developing an understanding of the world in which they live. From this perspective, learning is seen as a continuing process of 'participation' rather than a discrete instance of 'acquisition'. Yet, education is not simply a technical matter of facilitating an individual's learning. Indeed, thinking about education and technology only in terms of 'learning' narrows our attention towards specific processes and activities centred on the individual 'learner' rather than the broader aims and purposes of 'education'.

In basic terms, technology is understood as the process by which humans modify nature to meet their needs and wants. For example, learning management systems now play an important role in reducing teacher workloads and supports the tracking and monitoring of student progress, the management of learning materials and the provision of formative and summative assessments.

An interesting discussion on the challenges and barriers of using the technology in education is presented. Readers can identify the risks involved which may facilitate them in creating risk management practices. The following paragraphs is an explanation of the eight chapters in the book. In the first chapter, the author attempts to develop a basis for reevaluating educational technology. He starts by explaining education and technology in different perspectives and theories like Bloom taxonomy and Behaviorism. The author concludes that 'education' can be best explained

as the conditions and arrangements where learning takes place while 'technology' is understood as the process by which humans modify nature to meet their needs and wants. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that technologies do not always change things in education for the better. One of the questions leave at the end of chapter one is 'To what extent are the advantages of digital technologies related to matters of quantity rather than quality?' This is because digital technologies are often celebrated in terms of their speed, size and storage capacity. It is noted that understanding the advantages and limitations of the technology may assist us in utilizing technology efficiently.

The second chapter of the book attempts to make sense of the use of technology in education. Here, the author suggests to overcome barriers that deter people from taking part in learning through the distribution of educational opportunities via technology. This is supported by the advantages that technology may offer like making learning more flexible, more accessible, more reliable, reducing costs, and allowing people to learn anywhere and anytime.

Apart from that, the push for digital technology in education also stems from a range of interests and agendas outside of the education profession like policymakers, employers and parents. Indeed, pressures for technological change and technological expectations increasingly stem from young people who are now entering schools, colleges and universities. They are cohorts of students who were born in the era of the Internet and smartphones, and who consider digital technologies as an integral and natural part of life.

The use of technology in education is also due to 'disruptive innovation' which often leads to the reduction of prices, and forces providers to either change their ways or cease business. New innovation often forces education institutions to keep up with technology in education.

In short, most of the arguments about technology and education change in the second chapter involve fundamental challenges to existing ideas of what education is, why it is provided and how it is carried out. The author highlights that we need to think carefully about education and technology due to assumptions on the usefulness of technology while providing assistance to individuals in the learning process, facilitating the roles of

teachers in the learning process, improving curriculum and enhancing the status of the educational institution.

In the third chapter, the author takes a look at history of education and technology where he includes history in development of educational theories. Three advantages of looking from the historical perspective on education are justified.

Firstly, historical approach frames the development of technology within a long-term perspective, allowing us to understand how one technology may have ramifications for proceeding technologies, rather than one technology simply ‘replacing’ or ‘superseding’ another process. Secondly, a historical approach allows us to identify the significant long-term issues and concerns at play as specific technologies become ‘embedded’ into everyday life. Lastly, looking back at pre-digital histories can remind us of the ways in which ‘new’ technologies tend to be heavily promoted and ‘sold’ to education audiences.

In the fourth chapter, the author explores the controversies related to technology in education. He insists that we cannot fully understand education and technology unless we consider the key issue of how technology use can support, enhance and even improve learning. Therefore, we need to examine the ways in which digital technologies are associated with learning, and think a little more carefully about what learning ‘gains’ and improvements can be said to derive from technology use.

Readers interested in understanding the five of the key learning theories namely behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, constructionism and socio-cultural psychology which have influenced people’s expectations of education and technology over the twentieth century may find a review of their contributions here. The different theories described in this chapter present learning as individually centred. In contrast, growing numbers of psychologists over the last twenty years or so have turned their attention to understanding the influence of the wider social and cultural environments on individual’s learning and cognitive development. In this sense, many educationalists also share the view that learning is a profoundly social process. While accepting the general principle of individuals constructing their own knowledge and understanding, there is increased emphasis on how

these learning processes are located within 'socio-cultural' environment. In this sense, a successful learner is someone who is able to appropriate and deploy all of these resources in his or her actions and speech. The socio-cultural approach, therefore, stresses the importance of interaction with other people as a key resource for supporting cognitive activity and learning. In particular, other people are seen to play important roles in first selecting and shaping the learning experiences that are presented to individuals, and then supporting them in progressing to the next stage of knowledge and understanding.

Two emerging theories of technology-based learning that were further explored are 'connectivism' and 'connected learning'. Connectivism is an idea that learning relates primarily to the ability to access and use distributed information on a 'just-in-time' basis while 'connected learning' is described as a framework rather than theory of learning. As with socio-cultural theories of learning, the basic premise is that learning takes place through interactions with other people and resources in an individual's social contexts, including peers and more knowledgeable mentors.

The fifth chapter focuses on the teachers and technology. Among the issue is to what extent digital technology is compatible with teachers and teaching. As the core role of teacher is one of leading others in their learning, they are frequently blamed for being in adapting of digital technologies and there is a need to identify why teachers use the technology and vice versa. Here, the author discussed a few models like 'SAMR', 'LOTI' and 'TPACK'. Regardless of models and frameworks that direct our attention towards some important factors to bear in mind when making sense of teachers and teaching, the author argues that these models only explain the need of using technology in the classroom without guaranteeing of better teaching. Thus, to fully understand the relationship between technology and teaching, we need to consider how digital technology interacts with the work of a teacher.

The sixth chapter discusses the relation between technology and educational institution where each has its own structures. Thus, it is important to consider how digital technologies 'fit' with the structures. The author also argues if digital technologies really offer a better way of organising and providing educational opportunities. After discussing the



issues of reschooling and deschooling, the author suggests immediate changes that could be made to existing school curriculum and assessment in realising the potential of digital technology.

Chapter seven discusses the different forms of technology and individualisation of education as digital technologies now accommodate individuals' specific needs and interests. Personalise Learning Environment (PLE) is discussed as a means of allowing individuals to bring together and organise the various online tools, services and resources that they use in the course of their learning. The limitations of individualised learning, the difficulties of self-directed online learning, the social and emotional limitations of online education and the inequalities of individualised learning are also discussed.

Finally in the eighth chapter, the author discusses the current and future of technology in education. Technology is not only conceived as a tool to enhance and improve existing practices in educational setup, indeed it functions as a tool to enable education transformation towards more meaningful education for all learners. The author notes that misunderstanding the complex nature of change in education and technology will possibly risk overlooking crucial issues that impact education and change. Hence, we need to develop and promote better understandings of the realities of education and technology. The most important debates about education and technology concern must reflect what is actually happening. There a need of being critical in offering pushback against the current ways of doing things and offering alternatives. This involves being realistic, objective and skeptical, but with sense of hope.

Overall the book highlights potential ways to democratise of education and technology including encouraging students and teachers in producing digital technologies for education. The author has raised many questions in this book which can be useful for higher education leaders, instructors, course designer, organizations and students as they are actors who have key roles to overcome current issues in education and technology.

Disclaimer : This review has not been submitted and will not be submitted for publication anywhere else.

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### **Asian Journal of University Education**

The Asian Journal of University Education (AJUE) is an on-line scholarly international refereed journal. It is published twice a year by the Asian Centre for Research on University Learning and Teaching (ACRULeT), Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

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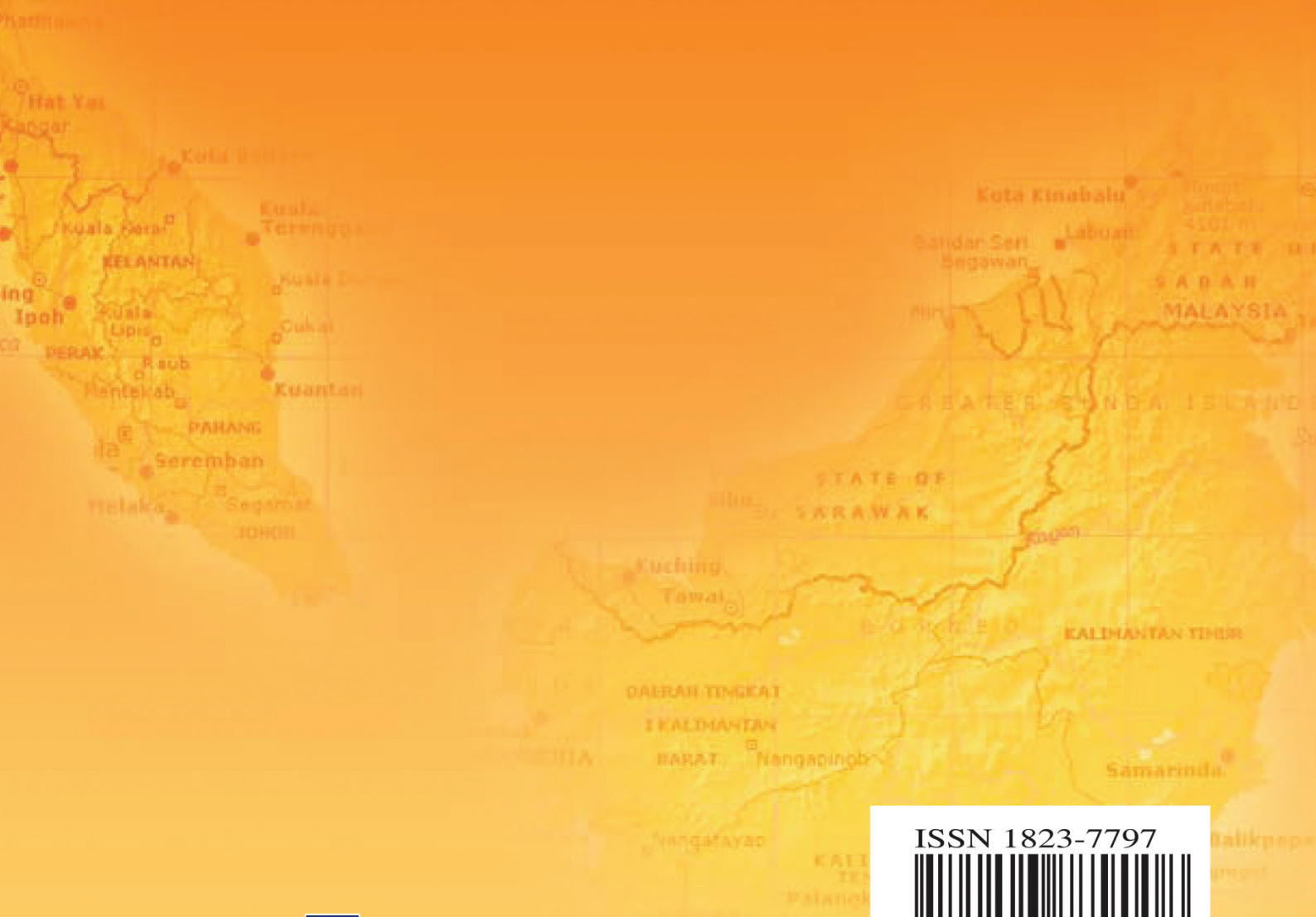
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